# Mission-Led Institutions

By Vernard T. Gant

It is possible, as evidenced in God's word, for religious organizations to be institutionally profitable and missionally poor. This happens when the means by which organizations exist take precedence over the ends for which they exist. It is the essence of institutionalism. Like all institutions, religious ones are prone to allowing the well-being of the institutions (the means) to supplant the well-being of people for whom they are established (the ends).

For example, the Sabbath had been institutionalized in Jesus' day to the degree that its value took precedence over the value of the people of God for whom it was created. Luke 13 records the incidence of a woman who was afflicted with a "spirit of infirmity" that had her bent over for 18 years. Jesus healed her in violation of the Sabbath institution causing indignation among those in charge of the institution. The people of God saw the woman through the eyes of the institution and were more concerned about its well-being. The Son of God, on the other hand, saw the woman as a distressed "daughter of Abraham" and was only concerned about her wellbeing. On another occasion, Jesus reminded the Sabbath institutional leaders that:

*The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.* (Mark 2:27)

However, as Jesus observed, the means had become the end.

Christ did not come for an organization, die for an organization, pour out His Spirit on an organization, nor is He returning for an organization. Only for people. Moreover, it is replete throughout God's word that He has an affinity for broken and distressed people.

What moved Nehemiah to mourn and pray and fast for four months and eventually to put his life on the line, was not because of the broken-down walls and burned gates of Jerusalem; rather, it was the plight of the people within those broken-down walls and burned gates. Nehemiah was moved by what moved the heart of God.

*And they said to me, "The survivors who are left from the captivity in the province are there in great distress and reproach.* (Ne 1:3)

He recognized that it was God's people at the core of the matter:

*Now these are Your servants and Your people, whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.* (Ne 1:10)

Also, the opponents were not disturbed because the walls were being rebuilt; rather:

*They were deeply disturbed that a man had come to seek the well-being of the children of Israel.* (Ne 2:10)

When Nehemiah addressed the leadership, he identified that the central concern was the plight of the people:

*Then I said to them, "You see the distress that we are in…* (Ne 2:17)

The wall was a means to address the plight of a distressed people, not an end.

Christian educators are uniquely qualified to offer children a Christ-honoring education that facilitates the heart of God for them. The institution of Christian schooling was established to that end. Institutions populated and led by God's people should reflect the heart of God for people. There are no indications that God cares about organizations, but that He cares about the people populating the organizations and the people for whom the organizations exist to serve. Again, the people and those services should be reflective of His heart as demonstrated in His word. God absolutely cares for the broken, the disenfranchised, the distressed. His caring is summed up in Jesus Christ. As such, people in need ("the sick" Lk 5:31) are central and not secondary to His agenda. The institutions that name His name and endeavor to facilitate His heart should reflect the same.

Jesus' introductory address was in reference to distressed people (Lk 4:18, 19); His final assessment will be in reference to distressed people (Mt 25:31-46). When He sent the disciples out to proclaim His kingdom, in every instance they addressed distressed people. The only stated indicator of "true religion" is in reference to people in distress (Jas 1:26, 27). Additionally, the vast majority of references to children in the Bible (over 90%) are about children in some form of distress.

**Distressed Children in God's Word**
> - Dead Children (1Ki 17:17-23; 2Ki 4:17-36; Mt 9:18,24-26; Mk 5:35-42; Lk 7:13-15; 8:49-56)
> - Demonized Children (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30; Mk 9:14-30; Lk 9:37-42)
> - Devoured Children (2Ki 6:28-29)
> - Deprived (Poor) Children (1Ki 17-17-23; 2Ki 4:1-7)
> - Disadvantaged (Fatherless) Children (Ex 22:22,24; Dt 10:18; Dt 14:29; Dt 16:11,14;
>    Dt 24:17,19,20,21; Dt 26:12,13; Ps 10:14,18; Ps 68:5; Ps 82:3; Ps146:9; Pr 23:10;
>    Isa 1:17,23; Isa 10:2; Je 5:28; Je 7:6; Je 22:3; Je 49:11; Eze 22:7; Ho 14:3; Zec 7:10; Jas 1:27)
> - Destroyed Children (Ex 1:22; 2Ki 10:1-8; 2Ki 16:3; 2Ki 17:17; 2Ki 21:6; 2Ch 33:6; Eze 26,31;
>    Mt 2:16-18)
> - Diseased Children (Jn 4:46-54)

There are very few references to advantaged and "well" children.

Therefore, institutions targeting and serving children that exist to represent the cause of Christ should reflect God's love and concern for children in distress and put the wellbeing of the people above the wellbeing of the organization so that the children are served to the glory of God.